



Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell

Councilor Maureen T. Carney

Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge

Councilor Ryan R. O'Donnell

MEETING MINUTES

Date: May 2, 2016

Time: 4:00 pm

**Location: City Council Chambers
212 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts**

1. Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call: At 4:00 p.m. Councilor Carney called the meeting to order. Present at the meeting were: Councilors Carney, Bidwell, O'Donnell and LaBarge. No other City Councilors were present.

2. Public Comment: None

3. Departmental Presentations

A. Public Safety Communications Center: Director Kelly Banister was present to give an update about the Communications Center (Emergency Dispatch).

Dispatch Center is an all civilian staff located on the second floor of the Fire Department. The office is closed to the public; it is a secure location. The department is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. When fully staffed, the department has ten dispatchers, one lead dispatcher and one director. Each shift has a minimum of two dispatchers who work eight hour shifts on a rotating basis. The employees are subject to holdovers and are required to work weekends and holidays.

The Dispatch Center is the City's communication hub for Police, Fire, and EMS. The department maintains "site" information (contact information, key holder information, etc.) for most businesses and for some residences. They monitor fire alarms for 165 businesses and all city buildings. The false-alarm fees generate revenue for the city which is put back into the City's general fund to pay for staffing. Dispatch is the primary after-hours contact for the DPW, Parking, Animal Control, and for other public buildings. The staff also administers the reverse 911 call system.

The Communications Center monitors the Police, and Fire using their radio system. By doing so, they make sure that all transmissions are relayed and that public safety officers are safe. They also monitor the DPW radio after hours; if necessary; they will call in DPW staff and dispatch them to an emergency location. They department monitors the Western Mass Law Enforcement Channel for Police & Fire giving them capability to speak to all surrounding area departments at the same time. This is important for certain types of calls, like high-speed motor vehicle pursuits. The department is equipped with emergency radios that reach City schools.

The 911 equipment consists of five landlines, four cell phones, and two administrative lines. There is free interpreter services available for residence calls; within a minute or so the Dispatch Center can connect with an interpreter for emergency calls. The call center has the ability to take a call; the software automatically links to the caller's address and this information is visible to the Dispatcher on a display screen. The Dispatchers also have the necessary equipment to communicate with the deaf and

hard of hearing callers. The Business lines currently consist of VOIP technology with copper line system back-up. The next generation of communication equipment will likely allow for text-to-911 capability.

The department has a structured training program for new hires. The training is done in three phases: first the classroom, then in-house, and finally on-the-job training. The training period lasts about 12-18 weeks. There are several training classes that are offered to employees:

911 equipment training

Basic Telecommunicator

Emergency medical dispatch

Emergency fire dispatch

Emergency police dispatch

Domestic violence

911 liability

Active shooter

Protecting LE responders

Suicide intervention

Stress ID & management

Testifying in court

CPR/AED/First Aid

Hostage negotiations

Of all the training listed, only the three highlighted in BOLD are required by the State for Dispatchers.

The department will be installing new radio consoles via the capital improvement program (\$375,000 recently approved by the City Council). The new consoles will be using a digital platform.

Director Banister is heading a committee to focus on identifying City-wide radio needs and existing capabilities. Serving on the committee along with Dispatch are representatives from Police, Fire, Schools, Parking, Central Services, and DPW.

The Dispatch Center is also working with area police departments to plan and prepare for large scale incidents that would necessitate mutual aid.

Funding for the department comes from:

\$576,000 from the General Fund

\$110,647 from State Grants

\$32,000 from Fire Alarm Fees

Councilor LaBarge asked about calls to Councilors when structure fires happen. Director Banister noted that when calls come in, the staff is focused on addressing the needs on the scene and may or may not be able to make calls to City Councilors. She will remind the staff that City Councilors would like to know when a serious incident happens in their ward.

Councilor O'Donnell asked about the increase in calls at the center. Director Banister stated that there seems to be an increase in medical calls. Also, within the past year, the Dispatch Center has taken over the day-to-day business calls for the Fire Department. State funding has remained constant, even though the call volume has gone up. The department is not guaranteed funding through grants from year-to-year; that revenue source is dependent upon the state budget. The grants are based upon the 911 call volume, not Business Line volume.

Councilor Bidwell asked about the nature of the mutual aid now. Director Banister indicated that Police mutual aid is very rare. An example of when Police mutual aid might be used is when there is a large fight; typical calls last only about twenty minutes or so. The Fire calls requiring mutual aid are more in-depth and are more the more typical type of department when mutual aid might be used. There are already agreements in place when mutual aid calls might be used.

Councilor LaBarge asked about the staffing turn-over. Director Banister stated that the burn-out period is between five and seven years due primarily to the schedule and the types of calls that the Dispatchers see. To prevent burnout, the department works at keeping employees engaged and involved. Some dispatchers take on more responsibility. They may become trainers or do Q & A on medical calls. Seventy-five percent of the current staff has been on board for over five years; forty percent have been on staff for over ten years.

B. Fire Rescue Department

Chief Nichols reports that the fires in Ward Three (North Street area) are no longer occurring, although increased surveillance in that area is on-going. Last week there was a dumpster fire on Bates Street caused by careless disposal of work materials or smoking materials by contractors working in the area. This incident does not seem to be related to the other mysterious brush fires that were occurring in that area. Councilor O'Donnell thanked the Chief for the on-going communication that happened after the fires.

The fire investigators track fires in the city. As fires come in, part of the fire investigator's job is to track the location of each fire. Within the North Street neighborhood, a small area was identified where numerous fires were occurring. Chief Nichols and Chief Kasper felt it was necessary to get the information out to the community to raise awareness. All the fires in that neighborhood have not been linked to the same root cause; the investigation is still on-going.

Councilor LaBarge asked about fires in Ward 6. Neighbors have taken pictures near the Extension of Park Hill Road and the neighboring field. There seems to be some sort of fire pit and left over trash. Chief Nichols has had a conversation with Chief Kasper about the concerns. It appears to be a party spot for teenagers.

Regarding Capital Projects, a new fire engine will be put in place to replace Engine 2 that is located in Florence. The Chief reports that more modern fire-fighting methods will be incorporated onto the new engine (compressed air foam system). This will be useful in the more remote areas of Wards 6 & 7. Deputy McQueston is heading a team that will decide the requirements for the new engine.

Another item in the Capital plan is "communication equipment". There is a committee that is looking to employ compatible communication equipment city-wide, including Fire, Police, DPW, Schools. Dispatch, etc. New pager equipment is also planned.

The door entry system and the station alerting system are also capital purchases for the Fire Department that will be procured by Central Services. The keyless "FOB" system in use at other city locations will be installed at the Fire Stations. The department will not be able to get parts for the current system if it breaks down. Having a secure facility for Dispatch is part of the Police Department's Accreditation requirements. The Station Alerting system alerts Fire personnel that there is an emergency call. The current system has been in place since 1999; when maintenance is required, it is quite costly due to the fact that the company that services the system is located in New Hampshire. The City pays mileage and labor charges to bring someone in to fix the unit. The new system will be a Purvis Station Alerting System that has the capability to be customized to NFD requirements. The computerized system will feature "ticker tape" information output.

In the Operations area, Chief Nichols reports that the department is moving to a paperless/wireless system. Assistant Chief Davine notes that the new technology includes iPads that can be used for inspections. Application software allows for inspection tracking, billing, scheduling and communications, inventory tracking and information storage.

The department has had 2,314 calls for Fire & EMS service since the beginning of the year. A new rescue truck has been in place since the beginning of the year. The unit has equipment that had previously been lacking, including a hitch to tow the department's boat, a specialized lighting package for night time emergencies, and water/ice rescue equipment. The department will be hiring two more fire fighters that will be coming on board the 1st of June. The department has just lost a fire fighter to the Agawam Fire Department and will potentially be losing another fire fighter due to resignation.

The department was actively involved in the "Extravaganza" event that took place at the Three County Fair Grounds on April 30th. Overall, the event went well from a Fire Department perspective. There were approx. fifteen medical calls that were addressed during the entire event, mostly due to dehydration. The department is planning to conduct a re-cap meeting to discuss what went right/wrong as a measure to plan for next year's event.

Regarding staffing, there were a few promotions that took place during the previous year; there is a new Deputy Chief and several new Captains; training is on-going for these positions.

The Chief reports that the Police Chief and Fire Chief have been working together on community issues. One initiative is the unified command post for larger events, such as First Night, Pride Parade, etc. The staff includes a Dispatcher, Police Officers and Fire Rescue personnel.

Deputy Chief Garriepy is responsible for the EMS services for the department. Part of his responsibilities includes EMS data management and billing services. A new billing company is now being used by the City for EMS services. It has been a lot of work to transition to a new vendor. Regarding

collection ratio as it pertains to billing, the department is accustomed to a 92 – 94% collection rate. However, there has been a delay in collections/reporting due to the transition to the new billing company.

The department is pleased to report that they will be receiving a \$118,000 grant through the state for EMS services. A lot of work went into pulling data and information together in order to obtain the grant; DC Garriepy worked with Finance Director Susan Wright to gather information in order to meet the requirements of the grant.

The EMS area uses a medical based software program. They have recently upgraded the software that will provide better information for decision making. The goal is better patient care and one of the benefits will be better tracking for emergency calls. Data sharing will also be improved in a paperless environment. DC Garriepy also described the department's use of ChartSwap, a record exchange platform that allows requestors to request, track, pay for and download records from any participating provider through a single platform. The department also uses a program call Schedulicity to schedule car seat inspections, fire detector inspections and to schedule student ride-along time.

DC Garriepy reviewed the AmbuPro EMS Information Dashboard. In addition to the data generated by the system, DE Garriepy reports that the Narcan use has increased by 1,000%. Not only has the number of calls increased, the dose per call has increased as well. Patients now require 2 – 3 times more dosage to reverse the effects of narcotics. The NFD does respond to overdoses in other communities due to the fact that they are a 24/7 responder. Communities are charged for those services.

Councilor O'Donnell asked about rail freight that travels through the City. He wondered whether the NFD was kept informed about the types of freight that travels through Northampton. Chief Nichols explained that there are set plans in place if an emergency were to happen within the city, such as a spill. Additionally, the state has hazardous materials teams that will respond to a spill. Railroads are not required to disclose freight contents

prior to travel. Fixed facilities (referred to Tier 2 facilities) are required to disclosed what hazardous materials are kept on-site. Deputy McQueston commented that a majority of the hazardous materials coming through the city is liquid propane gas.

4. Minutes of Previous Meetings

A. Minutes of March 7, 2016: Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes; Councilor O'Donnell seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

5. Review topics for upcoming meetings

June 7, 2016 - Parking Enforcement: Councilor Bidwell asked whether any of the recommendations as a result of the Parking Study are being considered for implementation.

June 28, 2016 – Health: Councilor Bidwell asked that the committee be provided with an update on the opioid epidemic.

Councilor O'Donnell moved to extend invitations to the two departments as discussed; Councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 yes, 0 No.

6. New Business: The Committee discussed the upcoming referral of the new DPW Director appointment. The Committee will hold a special meeting during the City Council meeting of May 19, 2016. The scheduling of the subcommittee meeting will need to be before the Council considers its Consent Agenda.

7. Adjourn: At 5:30 pm Councilor O'Donnell moved to adjourn the meeting; Councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

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